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ABSTRACT

In Montana, there are 151 small rural schools that constitute elementary independent districts with either a supervising teacher or a teaching principal as the head of the school. In fall 1998, a survey of all 151 schools examined enrollments, budgets, staff, salaries, and benefits. Enrollments ranged from 2 to 174 students; 83 schools had fewer than 19 students, the point at which a school is required to hire a second teacher. General fund budgets ranged from $22,000 to $97,216 for one-teacher schools and from $57,882 to $113,000 for two-teacher schools. Full-time teacher salaries ranged from $11,565 to $38,775. Tables present the number of schools in various salary ranges and average salaries for each fifth of the schools. Some type of housing for teachers was provided by 41 schools, primarily the lower-paying schools. Only 24 schools paid a specific stipend to the supervising teacher. Other data include mileage paid to teachers, provision of health insurance, janitorial duties performed by teachers, professional and personal leave days, and salaries of school clerks. Findings are compared to those of a 1992-93 study. Appendices include the survey form, a list of participating schools, and comments from the surveys. (SV)

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THE LAST BEST PLACE?

THE 1998-99 MONTANA RURAL TEACHER SALARY AND BENEFITS SURVEY

by

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RC 022133

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INTRODUCTION

Montana, sometimes called "The Last Best Place" has many splendid qualities, but it is not an easy place to make a living. Given its vast geographical size (147,046 square miles) and its sparse population (less than 1 million people) delivery of public services such as schools is especially difficult. There was a time when Montana had over 2,000 school districts (Anderson, 1972). As modern transportation came into being and people moved to different parts of the state, the number of school districts has changed. For the 1998-99 school year, the state education agency shows 455 budgeting and fiscal districts, but only 342 administrative units (Keenan, 1998). Of those administrative units, there are 151 school districts which have only a supervising teacher or a principal and whose administration is provided by the County Superintendents. These districts are, for the most part, multi-grade and are all elementary districts. Sixty-eight of them have fewer than two full time staff members and are often referred to as one-room schools. The teacher, and sometimes an aid, teaches all the students all the subjects, no matter their grade level. They supervise the students at playground duty, at lunch and if there are any extra-curricular activities they do those too.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

Six years ago, as the Director of the Montana Rural Education Center, this researcher undertook the first comprehensive study of rural teachers salaries and benefits in Montana. This past year, because of the success of the first study, the Montana Rural Education Center of Western Montana College of The University of Montana, one of the partners of the Montana Small Schools Alliance, contracted with the Alliance to conduct a second study. While salary and benefit data were again collected, the county superintendents wanted additional data collected such as general fund budgets, student enrollments and salaries for clerks so these items were added.

In the fall of 1998, surveys were sent to each county superintendent who supervised one or more rural schools. Those are schools which are elementary independent districts which have either a supervising teacher or in a few cases a teaching principal as the head of the school. [See Appendix A, for a copy of the Survey.] Those who did not respond by the due date were called and reminded and eventually, responses from 151 school districts were received in time to be used in the analysis. Those schools are listed in Appendix B. This is a return rate of 100 percent.

GENERAL ANALYSIS

Student Enrollments

While part of this study is a comparison of the very smallest public schools in Montana, it is not fair to compare their salaries and benefits without some additional data. So the first two sets of data collected were student enrollments and General Fund Budgets which have direct correlation since the amount of general fund budget is based, to a large extent, on student enrollment. The smallest school districts have one student and there are three of those. There are 46 more districts with student enrollments of 2 to 9. There are 37 with enrollments of from 10 to 18. When a school reaches more than that number of students, the trustees must hire two teachers according to state accreditation standards. There are 26 districts whose enrollments are between 19 to 39. Then there are 23 school districts with student enrollments of 40 to 98. Finally, there are 14 school districts with enrollments of 108 to 174 students.

General Fund Budgets

The smallest general fund budget is $22,000 for Benzein which has one teacher and two students. The school pays the teacher $16,000. At the other end of one teacher, one room schools is Community with a general fund budget of $97,216. The school has 14 students and pays the teacher $20,500.

Two teacher schools have general fund budgets in the range of Cohagen with $57,882 and 17 students to Basin with $113,000 general fund budget and 30 students. Having a larger general fund does not necessarily translate into better salaries and more benefits for teachers. The highest paid teacher in a one room school is at Craig. The teacher has 8 students. That professional receives $30,973, and the general fund budget is only $57,605.

Principals

As schools have more students and staff they reach a point where they hire a principal. Sometimes this person is also a teacher. Some schools with as few as six staff members have a principal, while others with as many as 15 professionals still utilize a supervising teacher. Twenty of the 151 school districts in this study have principals. The other 131 have supervising teachers. All 151 depend on the County Superintendent for supervision of their schools.

Salaries

With regard to salaries, the lowest full time teacher from these data is at Paradise and is paid $11,565. The highest is at Smith Valley and is paid $38,775. The following Table represents how many districts are in each salary range.

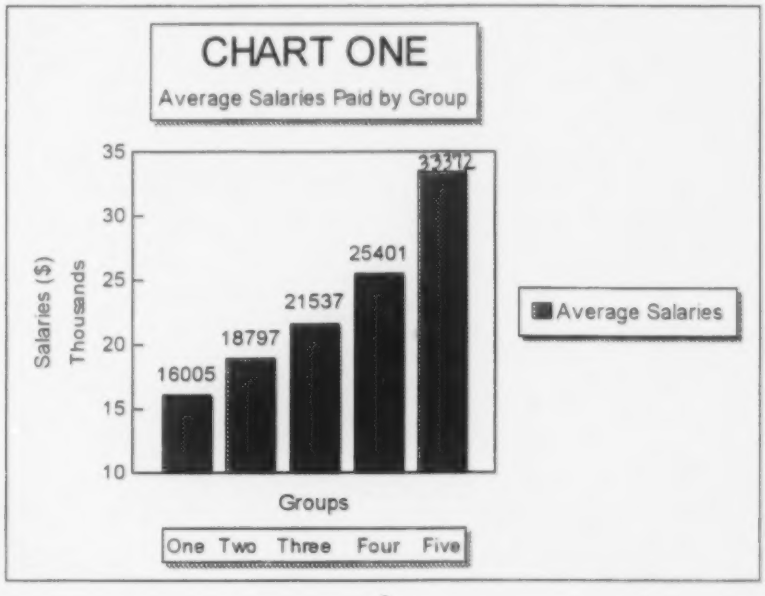
TABLE ONE

Number of School Districts in Montana in Each Salary Range

Number of School Districts	Salary Range
24	$30,000 or more
25	$25,000-$29,000
45	$20,000 -$24,999
48	$15,000 - $19,999
9	Under $15,000

In interpreting Table One, it is important to note that school districts with more than one teacher may have salaries in different categories for the different teachers. For example of the 24 school districts in the $30,000 plus category only one is a single teacher school. While all the salaries given below $18,000 are either for single teacher schools or for professionals who work less than full time.

To see how this breaks out in a different format see the following chart which divides the teachers' salaries into fifths and presents the averages for each group. This breakout will be helpful in comparing salaries and examining benefits as this report continues.



The Mean Salary in

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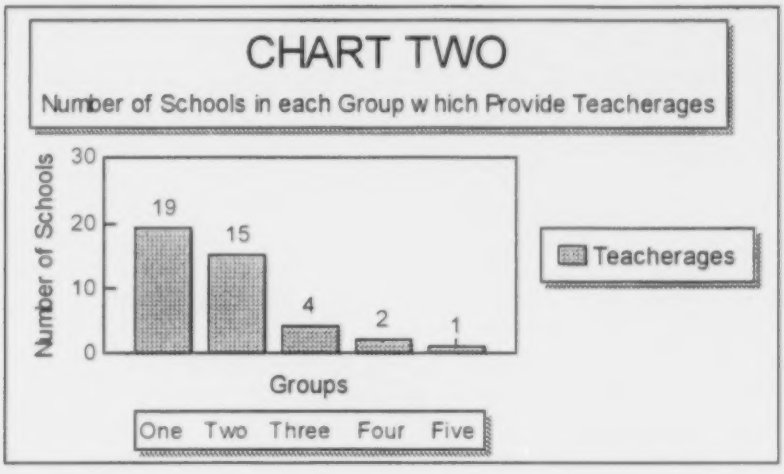
The Mean Salary in this survey is $21,500 and the Average Salary is $23,050.

Salary Schedules

Salary schedules appear rather unique in this group of schools. Of the total 151 schools districts only 27 have salary schedules. The lowest paid 60 school districts have no salary schedules, while 23 of the top paying 50 school districts have them.

Teacherages

At this time 41 of the 151 school districts surveyed provide some sort of housing for their teachers. The lower paying school districts tend to provide this benefit, although the lowest paid teacher does not have this benefit. In some cases, teachers may have to pay rent which is usually quite modest. Where housing is provided with no rent, generally it can be seen as at least a $2,000 a year benefit. [See Chart Two for a breakdown in number of districts per group which provide teacherages.]



Stipends for Supervising Teachers

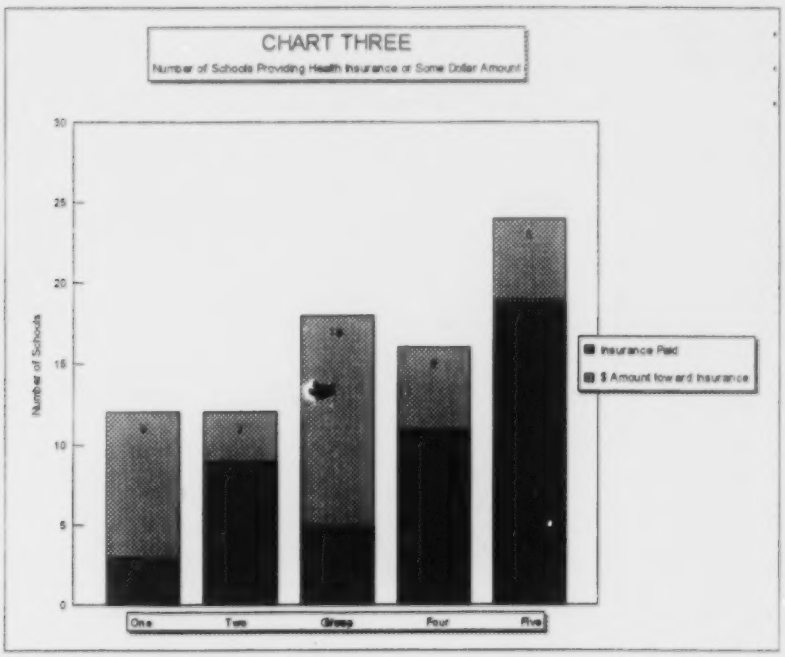
Only 24 rural school districts pay a specific stipend for the supervising teacher. Two schools pay a low of $400 while one pays $3800. The most common amount is paid by five school districts, and that is $1,000. The average of all the 19 districts which gave a dollar figure for the Supervising Teacher Stipend was $1246. In addition, one school district, Ulm, gave a stipend for coaching which was $750.

Mileage

Thirty-one school districts pay mileage to their teachers and the most common amount was $.315 a mile.

Health Insurance

Upon analysis, the data collected in this area was not as clear as it should have been. It would appear that 45 school districts actually provide health insurance for their teachers while another 31 districts give the teacher some dollar amount toward their health insurance. These amounts vary from a low of $125 to $1800. [See Chart Three for how the five different groups of teachers receive insurance coverage.]



Janitorial Duties

Fifty of the 151 school districts reported that teachers performed some janitorial duties. Two of these districts paid an additional amount for these services. Eighteen districts expected their teachers to perform 100 percent of the janitorial duties, while 20 districts expected their teachers to perform between 75 and 90 percent. In analyzing the data, the more teachers were paid, the less likely they were expected to do janitorial duties except where schools were more isolated. Also, there were some comments to the effect that the students worked with the teacher on these tasks. [See Chart Four for a breakout of schools in the different groups and the requirement to perform janitorial duties.]

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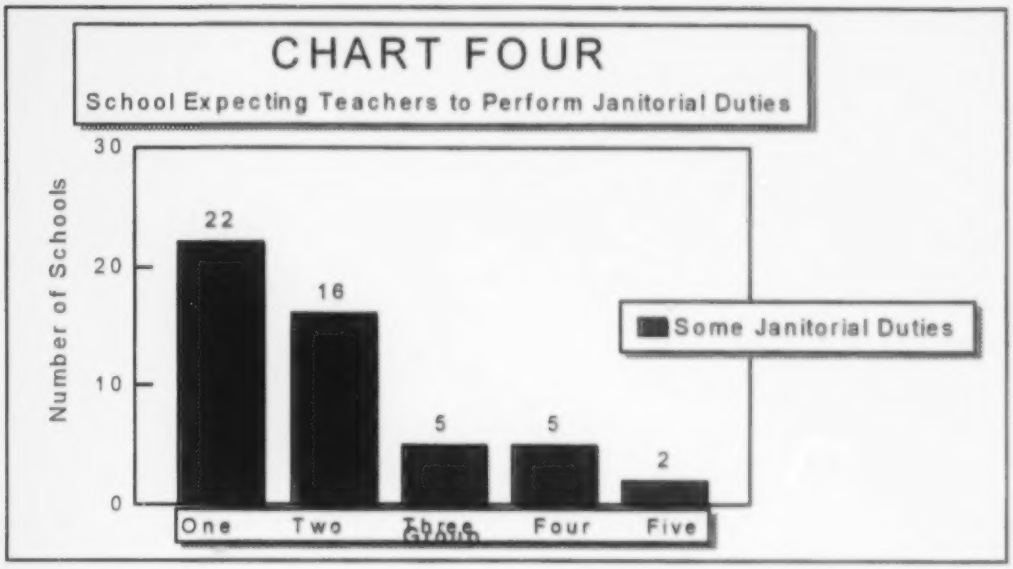


Leaves

Only six school districts of the 151 report that they provide no leaves. However, two more did not provide any amounts and said that the way the leaves could be used was unspecified.

Besides the eight school districts discussed above, only five schools responded that they had no sick leave. Twenty districts have a total for all leaves or a combination of leaves which can be used for a variety of purposes including sick leave. Fifty-one or slightly more than one-third of the rural school districts in Montana provide ten days of sick leave.

With regard to professional leave, 65 districts provide no professional leave, 20 provide two days. [See the table below for a break down of how many districts provide how many professional leave days.]

TABLE TWO
Professional Leave Days

# of School Districts	Professional Leave Days
65	0
8	1
20	2
9	3
5	4
1	5
1	6
10	7
5	Negotiated or Board decides
12	Days can be used anyway

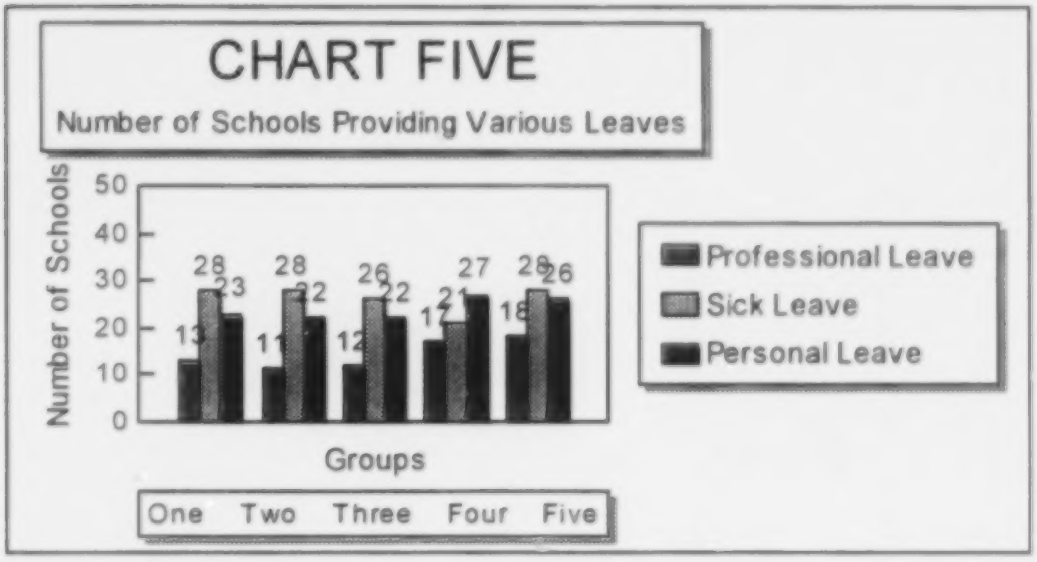
The survey also asked about personal leaves. Here again, many schools combine sick and personal leaves, but of the ones which provided a specific response the break out looks like the following:

TABLE THREE
Personal Leave

# of School Districts	# of Personal Leave Days
21	0
2	1
47	2
30	3
7	4
6	5
3	7
1	10
1	12

Fifty-six districts said that they allowed for an accumulation of leave days. Also, nine districts reported they provided bereavement leave, two provided emergency leave, one district had some flex leave, one district said it was up to the board, and one district does have a one year's leave with no pay.

To see how the leaves break out by groups, see Chart Five below.



Clerks' Salaries

Of interest also to the county superintendents were the salaries paid to clerks of school districts. While this data was collected and is listed on the complete tabulation of these data by school district it is difficult to see any trends. Annual clerks' salaries vary all the way from a low of $1,000 to a high of $36,000. Some clerks have other duties which were not researched in this work, however, the average clerk's salary was for this current year is $6300.

COMPARISON TO EARLIER STUDY

It is clear, just from the examination of the five charts that in general the more teachers are paid in the small rural elementary school districts of Montana, the ones in this study, the more likely they are to have health insurance, professional and personal leave and the less likely they are to have to perform janitorial responsibilities for their schools or have housing provided for them.

In comparing the results of this 1998-99 survey with the original survey conducted in the 1992-93 school year, rural teachers have made some gains but not as many as one might think. For example at that time the lowest salary was $11,309 (Morton, 1993). The lowest salary from this survey is $11,565, an increase of only $286 in six years. It should be noted that the lowest paying schools are not the same. On the other end of the salary range, in 1992-93 only nine school districts paid any teachers an annual salary of $30,000 or more (Morton, 1993). This year 24 districts in this survey are paying at least one teacher $30,000 or more.

The next area surveyed in which a comparison can be made is teacherages. In the first survey 63 school districts reported providing a place for their teachers to live (Morton, 1993). The number has declined over the past six years. For this current school year, only 41 rural school districts reported providing this benefit to their teachers. In both cases, the districts which paid their teachers less were more likely to provide a teacherage.

Health Insurance has been an area in which some differences have been made during the six years between the two studies. The 1992-93 study showed that 58 schools provided some dollars toward health insurance. Thirty-three districts provided 100 percent of an insurance premium and and 25 provided a dollar amount toward health insurance (Morton, 1993). In this current study, 76 school districts provide some dollars toward health insurance or health insurance. Forty-five school districts provide health insurance coverage for their teachers and another 31 districts give the teacher some money toward health insurance.

Another unique aspect of being a rural school teacher is the possibility of being required to perform some janitorial duties. In the earlier study, 63 school districts expected their teachers to perform some janitorial duties (Morton, 1993). In the current study, 50 of the schools still do. However, two of the schools reported paying an additional amount for this duty.

The last major area that can be compared is leaves for teachers. At the time of the first study, 89 districts provided professional leave and the average number of days was 3.47 (Morton, 1993) Interestingly, in the current research only 86 school districts provide professional leave and the average number of days is 3.3. One hundred thirty-eight schools provide sick leave this year as compared to 148 in the earlier survey. It should be noted, however, that two more schools said that while they did not specify amount teachers could have leaves. Finally, 132 rural districts provided personal leave for their teachers in the earlier survey with an average number of days of 2.6 (Morton, 1993). In the current study, 131 rural districts provide personal leave. The average number of days has increased slightly to 3.

CONCLUSION

It is clear, just from the examination of the five charts in this study, that, in general, the more teachers are paid in the small rural elementary school districts of Montana, the ones in this study, the more likely they are to have health insurance, professional and personal leaves, and the less likely they are to have to perform janitorial responsibilities for their schools or have housing provided for them.

In comparing the research of *The 1992-93 Montana Rural Teacher Salary and Benefits Survey* with this current study, it is clear that some gains have been made, but they are quite modest. Part of this has to do with the fact that Montana's economy has not been good during this time period as compared to the rest of the nation. Rural economics such as agriculture and forestry have been especially hard hit. Because of these factors and others, the state's school funding has been almost level.

While most of these teachers receive some professional recognition, it is difficult to see the rural schools of Montana competing for teachers as the nation begins to move into a teacher shortage. In fact, all of Montana's schools may find it more difficult to attract and retain good teachers. According to the latest information from the Montana School Boards Association, the average Montana teacher's salary for school year 1997-98 was $28,410 and the average salary for teachers in the next size school districts above these rural elementary school districts was $24,576 (MSBA,1999). "The Last Best Place" may not be able to court and keep teachers because of the scenery and small class size unless salaries and benefits are improved for this group of teachers who teach in Montana's smallest, most remote schools and for all the others as well. As one county superintendent summed up:

> *Rural schools are isolated county schools where the teachers are responsible for all the instruction of multi-grade students as well as playground supervision with no extra pay. They have a great responsibility and do a GREAT JOB !!!*

[To see this and other comments made by the county superintendents who completed this survey, please refer to Appendix C.]

APPENDIX A

RURAL TEACHER SALARY

COUNTY:_____

School	Enroll-ment	General Fund Budget	# of Prof Staff	Prin Yes/ No	Salary Schedule Yes/No	Lowest Salary $ amt	Highest Salary $ amt	Stipend for Supv Teacher	Housing Utilities Phone	Mileag $ amt

Please describe other benefits:

Other information you feel would be helpful:

& BENEFIT SURVEY 1998-99

Insurance e District $ amt	Prof Leave # days/yr	Sick Leave #days/yr	Personal Leave #days/yr	Other Leave #days/yr	Leaves cumula- tive?	Janitorial duties % of	Clerk's Salary $ amt

Please describe other duties expected or assigned: Is extra pay attached? If so, how much?

Optional: If you have a salary schedule, please attach. If you have relevant policy, please attach. THANK YOU.

APPENDIX B

MONTANA SCHOOLS WHICH PARTICIPATED IN SURVEY BY COUNTY

BEAVERHEAD
Grant
Wise River
Wisdom
Polaris
Jackson
Reichle

BIG HORN
Spring Creek
Community

BLAINE
North Harlem
Cleveland
Lone Tree
Zurich
Zurich 7-8
Lloyd
Cow Island
Bear Paw
People's Creek

CARBON
Edgar
Boyd
Luther
Jackson

CARTER
Hawks Home
Johnston
Albion
Coal Creek
Ridge
Alzada

CASCADE
Ulm

CHOUTEAU
Loma
Warrick
Carter
Knees
Benton Lake

CUSTER
Kircher
Trail Creek
Spring Creek
Cotton Wood
Moon Creek
Kinsey
Twin Buttes
SY
SH

DAWSON
Bloomfield
Deer Creek
Lindsay

FERGUS
Deerfield
King Colony
Spring Creek
Ayers

FLATHEAD
Deer Park
Fair-Mont-Egan
Swan River
West Glacier
Creston
Kila
Pleaseat Valley
Marion
Olney-Bissell
Smith Valley

GALLATIN
Amsterdam
Cottonwood
LaMotte
Malmborg
Pass Creek
Springhill

GARFIELD
Big Dry
Van Norman
Pine Grove
Kester
Cohagen
Benzien
Sand Springs
Ross

GLACIER
Mountain View
East Glacier

GRANITE
Hall

HILL
Gildford Colony
Cottonwood
Davey

JEFFERSON
Basin
Cardwell

JUDITH BASIN
Raynesford

LAKE
Up. West Shore
Valley View
Swan/Salmon

LEWIS & CLARK
Trinity
Craig
Wolf Creek
Auchard Creek

LIBERTY
Whitlash
Liberty

LINCOLN
Fortine
McCormick
Sylvanite
Yaak
Trego

MADISON
Alder

MCCONE
Vida
Southview

MEAGHER
Ringling
Lennep

MISSOULA
Potomac
Woodman
DeSmet
Sunset
Swan Valley

MUSSELSHELL
Musselshell

PARK
Cooke City
Springdale
Pine Creek
Arrowhead

PHILLIPS
Landusky

PONDERA
Miami
Dupuyer

POWDER RIVER
Belle Creek
Biddle

POWELL
Ovando
Helmville
Garrison
Elliston
Avon
Gold Creek

RICHLAND
Rau
Bronson

ROSEBUD
Ashland
Birney

SANDERS
Paradise
Camas Prairie
Trout Creek
Dixon

SILVER BOW
Ramsay
Melrose
Divide

STILLWATER
Fishtail
Nye
Molt

SWEET GRASS
Melville
Grey Cliff
McLeod

TETON
Bynum
Golden Ridge
Pendroy
Greenfield

TOOLE
Galata

VALLEY
Lustre

WHEATLAND
Two Dot
Shawmut

YELLOWSTONE
Blue Creek
Morin
Elysian
Pioneer

APPENDIX C

COMMENTS FROM 1998-99 RURAL TEACHERS' SALARY AND BENEFITS SURVEY

BEAVERHEAD

Wisdom: Some extra-curricular activities may be expected.

BIG HORN

Community: Teacher can accumulate 20 days of sick leave.

BLAINE

If there is only one teacher, other duties include recess and lunch. If there is more than one teacher, these duties are shared. Teachers are expected to do their own PE, Music and Art.

There is no extra pay, but it is expected that teachers will organize field trips and put on Christmas and Spring plays.

CARBON

State mileage rate paid when own car used for school business at all schools.

CARTER

Rural schools are isolated county schools where the teachers are responsible for all the instruction of multi-grade students as well as playground supervision with no extra pay. They have a great responsibility and do a GREAT JOB!!!

CHOUTEAU

This is the first year of declining enrollment. Usually Fort Benton's starting salary is $18,900. If enrollment stays down, the beginning salaries will stay down.

Loma teacher receives an additional $1,200.00 for performing janitorial duties.

Carter is locked in as a non-equalized school.

DAWSON

All schools have full time Title I Aides.

Bloomfield/Deer Creek have full time regular classroom aides.

FERGUS

Teacher Retirement System is another benefit.
Other duties include teachers drive to field trips and to the library. They do transport students and are paid mileage per current state allowance.

Spring Creek has a full-time Special Education Aide.

Ayers has a part-time Special Education Aide.

GALLATIN

Other duties include playground and programs with no extra pay.

GARFIELD

Cohagen teachers who have unused leaves are paid at $45 a day at the end of the year
Also, only highest paid teacher receives insurance compensation.

GLACIER

East Glacier: Principal is paid $36,000. Also, school has a salary schedule for teachers.

GRANITE

Hall: Supervising Teacher is expected to supervise all activities and be the Title Coordinator. For that he/she receives $2000 or 15%.

LAKE

Dayton: The male teacher was contracted additionally over the summer to complete building repair The significant rise in Salary is primarily due to Title I increases and supervisor of 2 aides.

Swan Lake-Salmon: The higher salary indicates mileage for special education intern travel between schools.

All schools now have separate janitors since the last survey and 4 of 6 teachers are now tenured.

LIBERTY

An Itinerant Librarian has been hired for both rural schools who travels to each building twice a month.

The Liberty School District has three buildings which are 35 to 70 miles apart. The three sites are:

Eagle Creek - one teacher, one aide, and 16 students
Riverview - two teachers, two aides and 37 students
Sage Creek - two teachers, one aide and 31 students

The Board signed an inter-local agreement with Chester Public Schools for budgeting jurisdiction for school buildings located at two other colonies in Liberty County. Agreement is valid for two years/legislative cycle.

The Board buys back for the teachers unused days at the end of each school year. Teacher is paid $44.00 for each of the 11 days not used.

Professional days are approved per request by individual teachers. Board pays for their sub and most often a part of a registration fee. Teachers do not use their 11 days for professional leave currently, but it may be a consideration if a request was to cover more than two days.

With regard to janitorial duties, the colony girls do the cleaning. They sweep daily and really scrub on Fridays.

Whitlash: The teacher does a bit more for janitorial duties as the janitor only comes once a week so daily requirement vary.

LINCOLN

Most of the teacher contracts do not include information regarding insurance or leaves.

MADISON

Alder: There is a full time teachers' aide. Lunch is provided. Teachers and aide split all recess duties equally.

Teachers receive 10 days leave to use as they like and are paid for days not taken at the end of the year..

MEAGHER

At Lennep there is $200 provided for librarian.

MISSOULA

Rural schools have salary schedules.

Number of professional staff at Woodman, Sunset and Swan Valley schools include teaching principal/supervising teacher.

PARK

Pine Creek and Arrowhead offer stipends for continuing education.

PHILLIPS

Landusky: Budget is at odds with OPI. We raised it from last year in the PL-874 exemption (we have that and unstable non-levy revenue we need to budget for.) $34576 in 97-98, $36,451 approved by board for 98-99.

Janitorial duties are specific. She is "hired" to do maintenance cleaning for $7 an hour. Extra duties are also reimbursed.

The board gives $100 a month toward health insurance against a premium invoice.

The house is a two bedroom, split entry teacherage with a two car garage.

The clerk's salary is $2400 flat and she is also hired for extra work.

PONDERA

Miami Colony cumulative leave is up to 30 days of sick leave
and unlimited Personal & Prof. leave.

POWDER RIVER

Belle Creek pays $138.89 for each of two PIR days for travel and expenses.
Biddle pays $105.85 for each of two PIR days for travel and expenses.

POWELL

Avon: The supervising teacher gets 2 extra personal days a year.
Garrison: The 1/2 time teacher serves as aid for 3 hrs/day 187 days per yr.
Helmville Housing is available at a reduced rate, $200 a month.

SANDERS

Lowest and Highest salaries are what is currently being paid, not from the salary schedule.

Paradise: Free lunch for playground duty.

SILVER BOW

Ramsay: District pays 85% of insurance & teachers have choice of family, two-party or single. If insurance not desired, teacher is paid the single amount. Leaves cumulative:
120 days - can buy back 60 days at one-half of sub. pay ($27.50). Unused Flex. Leave days revert to sick leave at end of year.

SWEET GRASS

McLeod: Leaves are paid out at a rate of $50 for unused sick/personal leave.

Melville: Teachers salary includes transportation or mileage payment. Leaves are paid out at sub rate of $45 per day if not used.

Grey Cliff: Insurance includes dental and life coverage. Leave is paid out at rate of $48. for unused sick and personal leave. Janitor is a contracted service. Has a salary schedule.

TETON

Greenfield: Other Leave is 3 days Emergency.

Golden Ridge: Other Leave is 3 days Emergency & 1 day Bereavement.

TOOLE

Galata is "above window" and has chosen to stay there. It has one multi handicapped student.

VALLEY

Lustre: Teachers were given a bonus at the end of the 97-98 school year of 3% based on their contract. Professional staff includes 4 full-time employees, one half-time and 2 shared with the H.S. Salary does not necessarily show what highest and lowest receive.
Housing is $3000 for a year with utilities included but not phone.
Insurance covers only the teacher and may vary.

Sick leave and personal leave are together for a total of 10 days.

Teacher in charge of extracurricular such as Section 504, academic activities, 8th grade advisor, etc receives $800 for additional duties.

Has a salary schedule.

YELLOWSTONE

Elysian - leave days at end of year are paid off.

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